

Examiners' Report/ Lead Examiner Feedback

Summer 2013

NQF BTEC Level 1/Level 2 Firsts in Art
and Design

Unit 2: Creative Project in Art and
Design (20478E)

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Introduction

This is a new specification, and differs from previous BTEC Level 2 Art & Design qualifications in that it has, at the Award level, an Externally Set Assessment, (ESA). This comprises an examination paper, for Unit 2, issued in January, with questions set for each of the six Pathways in the specification. Learners then have 20 hours for preparatory work, followed by a supervised examination period of 10 hours. The Unit requires learners to respond to a design / vocational brief, set in the form of an examination question.

In effect, each question is a short design brief with an associated pathway, client expectations and a defined context. Six Pathways are represented, and in this instance, each is associated with one of three themes.

The work is undertaken in two stages, a 20 hour preparatory period during which teachers can discuss the question paper with learners and then talk about their responses and ideas, followed by a fully supervised 10 hour 'exam' session during which teachers cannot give any help or guidance of this type.

This model of ESA is similar to that currently used in GCSE Art and Design so centres should not find the format difficult to understand, administrate or manage. However, there is an intention, reflected in the writing of the questions, that there is a clear sense of a vocational context, with client expectations, and these are included in each question.

The majority of students chose the Visual Arts Pathway, although a few entries were seen for Product Design and for Design Crafts. In some centres, teachers chose which question their students were to answer and in some cases students never saw the actual examination paper itself, as staff had decided to write a brief based on a selected question and distribute that to their students.

The paper is intended to be accessible and read by Level 2 learners, who may well benefit from having greater choice in their personal decision regarding Pathway and question. Students should certainly be given the examination paper as issued, and in a timely manner.

Assessment Feedback

The examination work seen by moderators covered the whole mark range available from 1 to 30. However, this first year of delivery has shown that a number of centres have marked leniently, some severely so.

Credit has been given in some instances for contextual material given to learners rather than independently researched and discovered by them. In some centres, a mechanistic approach to the 20 hours' preparatory period saw entire cohorts producing near-identical exercise-based work, with reference to artists or other contexts in the form of hand-outs, most of which had little or no relevance to the outcomes or creative intentions of the students.

There were instances where the marking criteria had been applied wrongly and credit given for work which was effectively identical student to student. This does not properly reflect the assessment criteria which state, for example, *'Explore and refine diverse designs and ideas in response to the brief, analysing creative intentions'*. In the same way, where whole groups are doing near-identical work, it is more difficult to find good evidence for *'select and apply diverse material, techniques and processes, analysing how they support creative intentions'*.

Learners did not demonstrate creative intentions, as their intentions had been decided for them. In many instances, no sense of selection was evident, as all students had been told what process, materials or techniques to use.

In the same context, some 'final' outcomes did not appear to be based on a clear chronology of creative development. Little primary research was seen in moderation visits, very little actual drawing, and where the use of photography would have been helpful and perhaps obvious; this was not made use of.

As a result, many learners showed no evidence of research into contexts, artists, makers, designers, industry or applications for their work. Some outcomes seen seemed to originate on the day of the exam, with no connection to any of the preparatory development. There was some indication in moderators' reports that students did not always understand the overall creative process which demonstrated that the Unit learning had not taken place, or had not been properly assimilated.

There are examples where centres have been visited, where the assessment is accurate, learners have been well-taught, exam preparation has been undertaken in a timely and organised manner and the exam work itself has resulted in pleasing, independently-evolved outcomes that meet the requirements of the briefs, and which have been accurately marked by centre staff. However, this is minimal.

In those better submissions, students have:

- Benefited from a course leading to the exam that prepares them for the required level of independent response
- Used primary and secondary sources for their research
- Developed ideas independently and recorded that process both visually and with annotations either in sketchbooks or on suitably-sized development sheets.
- Used the 20 hours to genuinely develop their ideas in response to a chosen exam question
- Worked with client expectations in mind whilst developing their own creative intentions
- Reflected and evaluated thoughtfully, continuously and actively, rather than producing a 'hindsight diary' at the very end of their work.
- Justified and evaluated how their decisions relate to their creative intentions, keeping client expectations in mind throughout the process
- Used the design process or design cycle to underpin their work.

Less successful submissions tend to share a number of the following characteristics:

- Little or no sense of independent enquiry
- Little or no independent decisions regarding research into artists, designers, makers or contexts
- Little or no primary source material, drawn or photographic
- Over-reliance on pre-produced, often irrelevant, hand-outs
- Lack of maturity in the interpretation of the briefs/questions
- Insufficient connection between development stages and final outcomes
- Poor use of the preparatory period and little sense of urgency or organisation for the 10 hours' exam time
- Weak practical skills in traditional media as well as an almost complete lack of the use of digital / IT media to help progress ideas and creative intentions
- Mechanistic exercise-based work delivered during the 20 hours preparatory period which did not help or encourage any individual creative intentions.

Administration

It has been observed that with some notable exceptions, the majority of centres did not appear to fully understand what the specification was asking for, in terms of *quality of work*. A great many centres seemed to be using the BTEC as a convenient option for lower ability pupils, almost all of whom were from year 9 (age 13) although sometimes with the addition of 'low ability' year 10 and 11 students in the same group.

Most often in the centres moderated this year, the qualification was being run over a year only, with the vast majority being Year 9 students, and often with less able candidates. The centres who did well stated that they had to do a considerable amount of additional work with these students, after school, sometimes, working late into the evening, to enable the students to achieve the necessary level needed to gain a Pass grade.

With a few significant exceptions, centres seemed to have either not properly read or understood the specification, Unit Description, assessment information, delivery guidance or the exam paper. As a result, centre assessment emerged as lenient overall and understanding of the requirements was variable.

The overall view is that there are some learners who have been well-supported, given suitable and sufficient access to staff and resources, and have been carefully prepared for the examination. These have indeed achieved both Pass and higher grades.

However, there are also larger numbers of learners where whole cohorts have failed to achieve anything better than a minimum Pass mark within the marking range, with many achieving at Level 1 only. Centres will need to consider the reasons for this.

It is clear from moderation that some centres found applying the marking criteria challenging. Many Centres did not appear to understand the necessary documentation which needed to be completed before moderators arrived and in one instance, a moderator had to mark, rather than moderate the work.

A further area for consideration is that regarding the exam paper and its interpretation. It emerged through the moderation that in some centres, the students did not see the exam paper. Some centres had selected the question their students were to answer and had copied it from the paper. Some staff had decided which question the whole cohort were to answer and had then written a fresh brief aimed at their learners. In one instance the moderator was told this had been done *'because the paper is too difficult for the pupils to understand'*.

This is a concern, since the exam paper is aimed at Level 2 learners and if this is a challenge, centres need to question whether they are recruiting with integrity. In another instance, the centre had inappropriately adapted the published exam paper,

by taking a theme from one pathway and using it for a different pathway, somehow conflating the two.

It is recommended that every learner sees the whole exam paper and make their own informed decision about which question to answer. The 20 hours' preparatory time allows for changes of mind, refinement of choice and establishment of direction.

Summary

Lessons need to be learned from this first year of examination of the externally set paper for Level 2, Unit 2:

- The cohort entered for the exam have to be sufficiently well-prepared to undertake independent work at Level 2, in the time available, and in supervised exam conditions.
- The learners have to be recruited with integrity to the level 2 qualification.
- Teaching staff have to familiarise themselves with the internally and externally assessed Units, the guidance materials, assessment criteria, marking grids and assessment guidance.
- The course will need to be properly resourced to support chosen pathways.
- The fundamental skills for research, observation, use of primary and secondary source material, ideas development, responding to a client brief, creation and presentation of final outcomes, evaluation and reflection need to be properly taught and assimilated prior to the exam.
- Staff and students need to see and understand the sample assessment material, example exam paper and other exemplar resources, in order to be clear about what is expected of them.
- The examination management staff and other essential supporting mechanisms need to be fully familiar with the requirements, timings and organisation of the Next Generation Level 1 / Level 2 qualification.

Grade Boundaries

Unit	Max Mark	D	M	P	L1	U
20478E – Unit 2: Creative Project in Art and Design	30	25	19	14	9	0

Introducing external assessment

The new suite of 'next generation' NQF BTECs now include an element of external assessment. This external assessment may be through a timetabled paper-based examination, an onscreen, on demand test or a set-task conducted under controlled conditions.

What is a grade boundary?

A grade boundary is where we 'set' the level of achievement required to obtain a certain grade for the externally assessed unit. We set grade boundaries for each grade (Distinction, Merit, Pass and Level 1 fallback).

Setting grade boundaries

When we set grade boundaries, we look at the performance of every learner who took the assessment. When we can see the full picture of performance, our experts are then able to decide where best to place the grade boundaries - this means that they decide what the lowest possible mark should be for a particular grade.

When our experts set the grade boundaries, they make sure that learners receive grades which reflect their ability. We will be awarding grade boundaries for the first time for our new next generation BTECs, so this means that a learner who receives an 'Distinction' grade next year, will have similar ability to a learner who has received an 'Distinction' grade this year. Awarding grade boundaries is conducted to make sure learners achieve the grade they deserve to achieve, irrespective of variation in the external assessment.

Variations in externally assessed question papers

Each exam we set asks different questions and may assess different parts of the unit content outlined in the specification. It would be unfair to learners if we set the same grade boundaries year on year because then it wouldn't take into account that a paper may be slightly easier or more difficult than the year before.

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